



2018 Testimony

900 CHAPEL STREET, 9th FLOOR, NEW HAVEN, CT 06510 • PHONE (203) 498-3000

Education Committee

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The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 96% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate the opportunity to testify on bills of interest to towns and cities.

HB 5171 An Act Prohibiting The Executive Branch From Making Rescissions Or Other Reductions To The Education Cost Sharing Grant During the Fiscal Year

SB 8 An Act Implementing The Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning Education.

Good morning, Co-chairs Fleischman, Slossberg and Boucher, Ranking Member Lavielle and distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is **Shari Cantor, Mayor of West Hartford** and I am presenting testimony today on behalf of my community and CCM.

- CCM opposes SB 8
- CCM supports HB 5171

West Hartford prides itself on the success of our award-winning school system, but as a district we cannot sustain the quality of programs that our community and its 9500 students expect given the financial shortfalls from ECS and other grant reductions or eliminations.

As a result of the most recent holdbacks, West Hartford will have to absorb \$2,226,093 in total midyear cuts, representing a reduction of 9.3% from the state adopted FY18 budget. This includes a midyear reduction of \$1,802,468 in our ECS grant. CCM opposes SB 8 as it would carry forward these detrimental holdbacks and reduce or in some cases completely eliminate ECS funding for towns with a high property tax base.

West Hartford's tax base is primarily residential and our property tax payers have provided the bulk of the support for the excellent education program offered by our school district. Property taxes have increased from 69.7% of the Town's revenues in FY 2008 to 87% in FY 2018. Despite its reputation for being wealthy, West Hartford taxpayers, with varying demographic and economic backgrounds, cannot sustain such a dramatic increase in its tax burden. West Hartford is ranked 67th in the Connecticut for median household income, 8% of residents live below the poverty line and 21.5% of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Our diverse school population is 42% minority, 21.5% of our students have a primary language other than English and 74 different languages are spoken in the homes of our students. Yet, our per pupil spending is 128 out of 169 municipalities and our increase in Advanced Placement participation has gone up by 74% over these past 10 years as our per pupil spending has declined. We have combined all possible positions between the board of education and town administration.

We are very proud of the success of all of our students and the efficiency of the West Hartford Public Schools.

Many CCM member towns, including West Hartford, have been fiscally responsible, implemented multi-year forecasting, established adequate reserves, and practiced responsible and forward-thinking management practices. We have been recognized by the credit rating agencies for implementing significant plan changes in pension and healthcare benefits that have and will substantially decrease our liabilities now as well as in future years. West Hartford and other Connecticut towns should not be penalized for our prudent fiscal management.

CCM **supports HB 5171** as a way to help provide stability and predictability in state funding for education and the proposal is an important provision to protect the ability of municipalities to manage our municipal budget in a responsible and prudent manner. Because Connecticut's system of state and local taxation is not as diverse as the systems in other states, we are overly reliant on the property tax and very dependent on state aid. FY 2018 has been a year like no other as we have juggled multiple state aid scenarios including the possibility of a total loss of our \$20 million ECS grant. While uncertainty during the budget process is difficult enough, it is all the more challenging to manage in a responsible manner when the executive branch makes rescissions to state aid after the start of a new fiscal year. We therefore seek your strong support of this bill.

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If you have any questions, please contact Daniel C. Giungi, Senior Legislative Associate for CCM, at dgiungi@ccm-ct.org or (203) 498-3023.